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LE PETIT LINGOT D'OR<sup>1</sup>A Note on *l'Abbé Constantin*

When Bettina makes her dazzling entry into her box at the Paris Opera, she creates a sensation. Two young noblemen, Roger de Puymartin and Louis de Martillet give expression to their admiration in a historic phrase of which the connotation seems to have escaped the commentators of *L'Abbé Constantin*. "‘Ah! ah! dit Puymartin, le voilà, le petit lingot d’or!’ Tous deux braquèrent leurs lorgnettes sur Bettina.—‘Il est éblouissant, ce soir, le petit lingot d’or,’ continua Martillet.” (*L'Abbé Constantin*, p. 66, edit. of Henry Holt, 1918.) They then proceed to discuss the chances of various noble suitors for the hand of the fascinating heiress. The repetition of the phrase would seem to indicate that Halévy thought it appropriate to the situation and to the speakers. Possibly it is worth while to ask why.

The young nobles were doubtless thinking of another bourgeois millionaire who regilded an escutcheon in the early eighteenth century. Here is the story as told by the most punctilious of aristocrats, the Duke de Saint-Simon. "Le comte d'Evreux, troisième fils de M. de Bouillon, avait trouvé dans les grâces du Roi, procurées par M. le comte de Toulouse, et dans la bourse de ses amis, de quoi se revêtir de la charge de colonel général de la cavalerie du comte d'Auvergne, son oncle; mais il n'avait ni de quoi les payer, ni de quoi y vivre, et M. de Bouillon ni le cardinal n'étaient pas en état ou en volonté de lui en donner. Il résolut donc à sauter le bâton de la mésalliance, et de faire princesse par la grâce du Roi la fille de Crozat, qui, de bas commis, puis de petit financier, enfin de caissier du clergé, s'était mis aux aventures de la mer et des banques, et passait avec raison pour un des plus riches hommes de Paris. Mme de Bouillon . . . nous pria instamment d'aller voir toute la parentèle nombreuse et grotesque pour être assimilée aux descendants prétendus des anciens ducs de Guyenne. Elle nous en donna la liste, et nous fûmes chez tous, que nous trouvâmes engoués de joie. Il n'y eut que la mère de Mme Crozat qui n'en perdit pas le bon sens: elle reçut les visites avec un air fort respectueux, mais tranquille, répondit que c'était un honneur si au-dessus d'eux, qu'elle ne savait comment remercier de la peine qu'on prenait, et ajouta à tous qu'elle croyait mieux marquer son respect en ne retournant point remercier, que d'importuner des personnes si différentes de ce qu'elle était, lesquelles ne l'étaient déjà que trop de l'honneur qu'elles lui voulaient bien faire; et n'alla chez personne. Jamais elle n'approuva ce mariage, dont elle prévit et prédit les promptes suites. Crozat fit chez lui une superbe noce, et logea et nourrit les mariés. Mme de Bouillon

<sup>1</sup> It is a pleasure to thank the reference librarian of the Congressional Library who kindly sent me the passage quoted from Saint-Simon.

appelait cette belle-fille son petit lingot d'or."<sup>2</sup> (*Mém.* Ed. Boislisle, XIV, pp. 362 f.

Saint-Simon tells us later that this marriage was to become for Crozat "le repentir et la douleur de tout le reste de sa vie." Surely Bettina did wisely in preferring to her princely suitors the lieutenant of artillery. France possesses a lasting souvenir of "le petit lingot d'or," for the residence of the president of the republic, the Palais de l'Elysée, was built in 1718 for the comte d'Evreux, and largely with the dowry of his bride.

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*Kaum ein Hauch: A REPLY*

Criticism is justifiable only in so far as it is implicitly or explicitly constructive. An article in the November Journal entitled "The Immortality of Examination Pests" sins against both these canons. Besides, it is in poor taste: like the title of my reply.

First of all, it surely is not the special competence of a New Jerseyite to criticize the educational system of a neighboring state. What, legitimately, may he be expected to know about it? In the second place, it is the easiest thing in the world to pick flaws, just as it is the most difficult thing in the world to turn out a flawless piece of work.

It may interest the readers of the Journal to know how the New York State examinations are controlled. They are formulated by committees of specialists, representing (1) the State Department of Education, (2) the High Schools, (3) the Colleges. The best teachers in the State are, in rotation, selected by the State Examinations Board to serve on the various committees. If an examination is faulty, the defect is inseparable from defects in human nature and the nature of examinations *per se*. The very men who are most prone to criticize these examinations prove to be just as vulnerable, when appointed to our committees, as their predecessors. Indeed, the principal of one of our largest and best high schools recently told me that he would gladly give me over his signature a statement that "heads of departments in his school had, in conjunction with their teachers, been guilty of making worse local examinations than any state-wide examinations ever perpetrated by the Regents' committees."

An examination must be judged as a whole; and the system by its general average of achievement. We should not think of condemning the beauty of a face, which was marred only by eyes

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Littré, *Dictionnaire*, s. v.